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Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications

Report of the Secretary-General*

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 56/64 B of 24 December 2001, the General Assembly took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications, encouraged him to continue the reorientation exercise, while stressing the need to take into account the views of Member States, and requested him to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session.

2. The General Assembly also emphasized that, through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation should contribute to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications.

3. At the same time, the General Assembly, in resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001 on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, requested the Secretary-General to conduct a comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department of Public Information, taking into account the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005,[1] and to report thereon at its fifty-seventh session. The comprehensive review would address, among other things, the Department's overall effectiveness and efficiency, the focusing of its work to better reflect the substantive priorities and relevant mandates of the Organization, the need for greater coordination within the Secretariat on public information activities, and the work and funding of the United Nations information centres.

II. From reorientation to comprehensive review

4. As the Committee is aware, the Secretary-General has submitted three previous reports to the Committee on Information on the reorientation of the Department

* The present report was submitted to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services on 22 March 2002, owing to the time-frame of the ongoing comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department of Public Information (see para. 6), called for by the General Assembly in resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001.

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/55/6/Rev.1); adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/234 of 23 December 2000.

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of Public Information (A/AC.198/1999/2, A/AC.198/2000/2 and A/AC.198/2001/2). These yearly reports have followed up on the earlier recommendations made by the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities (A/AC.198/1997/CRP.1), appointed by the Secretary-General in 1997 to examine possible ways and means for the Department to reorient its work in order to convey the United Nations story with more vigour and purpose, and to greater effect. The fundamental premise underlying the Department's reorientation efforts remains General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, establishing the Department of Public Information, which states that "the activities of the Department of Public Information should be so organized and directed as to promote to the greatest possible extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among the peoples of the world".

5. The reorientation reports have focused on the Department's efforts to achieve this basic objective by ensuring that communications is placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations, and have highlighted the steps taken by the Department of Public Information to implement the programmes necessary to fulfil this end. The reports have reflected the progress made by the Department in responding to the Secretary-General's strong commitment to enhanced communications as a key element in the reform and revitalization of the United Nations in a new information age, and to developing a culture of communications within the Organization. This significant progress has also been most recently described in detail to the General Assembly in the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information, of 27 September 2001 (A/56/411). In an effort to avoid repetition, the present report will therefore not include an exhaustive account of the Department's recent accomplishments, preferring to focus instead on those areas in which room for improvement has been discerned.

6. Indeed, the approval by the General Assembly of the programme budget of the Department of Public Information for the biennium 2002-2003 and its overall support for the goals and new directions of the Department have not given the Department any grounds for complacency. The General Assembly's call for a comprehensive review, which was included in the same resolution, provides the Department with an opportunity to take further steps to rationalize its activities and outputs, enhance its efficiency and effectiveness, and maximize the use of its resources. The Secretary-General entrusted the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information with the task of leading the review. The Secretariat accepted an offer of pro bono assistance from a highly regarded management consultancy firm to assist the Department of Public Information in the conduct of the review, which began in January 2002 and will conclude in May of this year. In the course of this review, over 70 interviews have already been carried out with a wide range of interested individuals, including a cross-section of DPI staff and other members of the Secretariat, representatives of Member States, non-governmental organizations, the media, and other "clients" of the Department's services.

7. The comprehensive review of the Department is intended to complete the process of reorientation. It was therefore decided, with the agreement of the Bureau of the Committee on Information, which met on 24 January 2002, that the current reorientation report provided a good opportunity to present to the Committee a preliminary outline of the principal issues and findings emerging from the comprehensive review so far and the strategic direction which the Department of Public Information is considering as a result.

8. It should be noted that in several paragraphs of resolution 56/64 B, the General Assembly called on the Department to provide specific information to the Committee on Information in the context of the current report. In this connection, the request contained in paragraph 15 concerning the reach and scope of activities of the Department is a broad one and will therefore be addressed in the present report. The details requested with regard to communications strategies (para. 24), United Nations houses (para. 32), the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library (paras. 44 and 45), and the United Nations web site (para. 58), are contained in the annex to this report.

9. As the principal legislative body mandated to make recommendations to the General Assembly on the work of the Department of Public Information, the Committee on Information will no doubt wish to offer its views and make specific recommendations on the broad principles and directions contained in the current report. The current comprehensive review, when completed, following the Committee on Information's deliberations, will form the basis for the report on the

comprehensive review to be submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, requested in resolution 56/253. As such, the Secretariat looks forward to the Committee's guidance on the issues raised in the present report.

III. Issues and findings

10. Since 1948, there have been at least seven periodic reviews and/or reappraisals of United Nations public information policies and activities, conducted both by internal oversight bodies and outside groups, most of them in the last 20 years. In addition, a major restructuring of the Department was carried out by the then Under-Secretary-General for Public Information in 1987-1988.

11. However, despite these numerous attempts at reform, and the progress made in the course of the reorientation of the work of the Department, the current review has demonstrated that the Department continues to face a number of critical deficiencies, which adversely affect its ability to deliver its work programme effectively and with the greatest impact.

12. The fundamental problem identified in the current review of DPI relates to the prevailing ambiguity surrounding its mission (or "aspiration"), as well as a lack of definition in the target audiences for the Department's various activities. The principal reason for this lack of clarity is that the Department has been given more than 120 mandates by the General Assembly, and undertakes more than 60 formal activities, as well as numerous ad hoc requests generated within the Secretariat. The mandates range from legislative requirements of considerable generality, such as General Assembly resolution 55/101 ("Respect for the purposes and principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations to achieve international cooperation in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms and in solving international problems of a humanitarian character"), to those which, though more specific, are in practice unattainable (for example, the requirement in General Assembly resolution 54/68 "to increase the awareness of the general public with regard to the benefits of space technology"), to those which are so specific as to amount to micromanagement, such as mandates requiring the creation of a particular post to perform a particular function. This proliferation of mandates has not only created a heavy workload for the Department, but has contributed to the fragmentation of its activities, many of which do not attain the high impact that is desired.

13. The basic question that arises is, therefore: what do Member States expect of the Department of Public Information? At one level, it functions as a Department of the Secretariat whose programmes are designed to execute the mandates assigned to it by Governments, including providing specific services to Member States (examples of which are detailed in a later section of this report). At the same time, it is seen as the principal arm of the Organization's outreach to the world, providing services to media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and the general public. Some of its functions, however, such as the provision of cartographic services to the Organization and the provision of library facilities to delegations, do not fall comfortably in the "public information" category, as is discussed in paragraphs 23 to 27 below.

14. A related issue is that of the Department's target audiences. Some of its products and services, as noted above, are directed specifically at Member States and their delegations. Others, such as the *Yearbook of the United Nations*, aim not only at Governments but at researchers and serious students of the Organization. Still others target a well-informed segment of the public which has a demonstrated interest in the United Nations: this is the case with the *United Nations Chronicle* and a number of the Department's brochures and handouts. Yet other products (United Nations radio and television programmes, for instance) aim at the public at large. Some of the Department's efforts seek to inform and influence intermediaries — notably the mass media, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions — whereas others reach individuals who are direct beneficiaries of the services provided (such as exhibitions and special events at United Nations Headquarters, which reach visitors to New York, representatives of non-governmental organizations and delegations of Member States, but few others). The question whether such a mix of target audiences is desirable depends to a great extent on what Member States wish the Department of Public Information to do.

15. The Department also has a limited ability to match programme performance with "customer needs". In the past, performance management has been a problem area for the Department, principally because,

with a wide range of activities, the Department has devoted few resources to evaluating the impact of its activities, feeling that activities must be performed because they are mandated rather than because they are demonstrably effective. This is not a predicament unique to DPI but one which is integral to the organizational culture of the Secretariat, and needs to be addressed as such.

16. It is recognized that performance management must be part of all of the major DPI activities and programmes. The need for the Department to institute a mechanism for continuous feedback and evaluation has been reinforced by the dissatisfaction expressed by some Secretariat Departments, in the course of the interviews carried out during this review, with the communications support provided to them by DPI. It is a key objective of the present exercise to address these areas of dissatisfaction.

17. A thorough top-to-bottom examination of the Department of Public Information was conducted in order to align its core competencies with the long list of mandates and activities it carries out in accordance with the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005. Areas of duplication and fragmentation of functions in the structure of the Department of Public Information have been singled out for further examination, as have opportunities for greater coordination within the Secretariat as a whole, to avoid overlapping of effort.

18. While the review identified several issues relating to human resources which have negatively affected the work of the Department — relating mainly to recruitment processes, the ability to assign staff according to organizational needs, and the difficulties in allocating staff resources to areas and programmes of greatest impact — these are not dealt with in the present report. As the Committee is aware, these issues will be addressed in the context of the new human resources strategies being developed within the Secretariat, whose resolution is expected to have a beneficial impact on all Departments.

IV. Positioning DPI for greater impact

A. Mission statement

19. Fundamental to addressing the deficiencies and to making any real change possible is the need to develop a clear mission statement for the Department of Public Information. The overarching strategic vision remains that crafted in 1946 — "to promote to the greatest possible extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations". To achieve this vision and build the widest public support for the Organization in a manner which will yield the greatest impact, the following mission statement for the Department is proposed:

> *"The Department of Public Information's mission is to manage and coordinate United Nations communications content — generated by the activities of the Organization and its component parts — and strategically to convey this content, especially through appropriate intermediaries, to achieve the greatest public impact."*

20. This formulation, arrived at after considerable self-examination and extensive consultation, combines a number of key elements. It recognizes that the "content" that the Department must communicate is generated by the substantive work of the Organization, rather than by the Department's sense of its mandated responsibilities. It expects the Department to manage that content and to coordinate information from various United Nations sources, with a view to conveying it to the public. It also recognizes the Organization's obligation to provide users with the information they require with respect to the activities of the United Nations. It stresses that the Department will work strategically, rather than tactically, emphasizing the broader picture with the Organization's overall goals in mind. It assumes that the "greatest public impact" will vary, depending on the issue involved and the audience targeted. And it understands that the Department will need to work through intermediaries in order to "leverage" its activities, focusing in particular on key intermediaries, such as the media, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions, rather than attempting directly to reach the public at large. This multiplier approach is also seen to be a lower-cost alternative to direct outreach, which would utilize and empower those in the best position to deliver the message to the widest audiences. To accomplish this, DPI should concentrate more on applying its communications expertise in refining, crafting and conveying the substantive content obtained from other offices and Departments, rather than creating the bulk of its communications content on its own.

21. The Department's major challenges in positioning itself for greater impact include developing more focused messages, with less fragmentation of its output; better identifying target audiences, and attracting new audiences; prioritizing the allocation of its limited resources among the many mandated activities; identifying those programmes and activities that can be improved upon or eliminated; and finally, establishing a departmental structure to accomplish these goals.

22. The Department of Public Information, in living up to its mission statement and meeting the above challenges it has set for itself, must of course be guided by the priorities laid down by the General Assembly and those which the Secretary-General set at the beginning of his second term of office. In this regard, as the process continues, and using the Millennium Declaration as its template, the Department will reset its priorities, address its deficiencies, and improve its work methods. In doing so, the Department will pay particular attention to the major issues which the Secretary-General has already emphasized: poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the battle against international terrorism and the needs of the African continent.

B. Services to Member States

23. Some of the criticism of the Department of Public Information has tended to overlook the extensive nature of the services it provides to Member States, going beyond the function of "public information" as such. The mandate of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, for instance, as outlined in paragraphs 4 and 5 of document A/C.5/298, has, since 1950, specified the Library's "primary function" as being "to enable the delegations, Secretariat and other official groups of the Organization to obtain, with the greatest possible speed, convenience and economy, the library materials and information needed in the execution of their duties". The General Assembly went on to specify that the Library's service to the public "must necessarily be subordinated to the service needed by the United Nations". DPI library work has therefore been geared principally to the needs of Member States, and has included such activities as the provision of training courses to delegations in the use of print and electronic documentation and in searching the Web, in addition to regional training programmes for depository librarians in developing countries, neither of which would be seen as constituting "public information" activities in the classic sense.

24. The Cartographic Section provides cartographic presentations for briefings given during Security Council consultations and technical assistance to delegations in answering queries related to maps and in finding and using geographic information. Its recent work has included the provision of technical assistance in settling international boundary disputes between Member States, including the Iraq-Kuwait boundary demarcation, the establishment of the line of withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon (the "Blue Line") and the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission. Such activities are rarely discussed in determining the appropriate "mission statement" of the Department of Public Information.

25. Other examples abound. The major DPI publications, notably the *Yearbook of the United Nations*, *Africa Recovery* and the *United Nations Chronicle*, are distributed to each Permanent Mission to the United Nations; the delegations of Member States constitute, in these cases, a significant portion of the audience for these publications. The design services of the Graphic Design Unit are provided gratis to Member States, when possible. Promotional material is sent to the Permanent Missions announcing the availability of key print and electronic publications, and free access is provided to major online databases (e.g., the United Nations Treaty Collection online; UNSTATS Common Database). The Department of Public Information provides a wide range of services to delegations through its public services programme, including arranging guided tours and briefing groups sponsored by delegations. When requested by delegations, DPI works to organize special events. The Department also works with delegations whose exhibits are sponsored by an organ of the United Nations. The DPI video and photo libraries handle frequent requests from delegations for current video and photographic coverage, as well as archival requests. Delegations routinely request photographs and videotape of their Head of State addressing the General Assembly, or other senior government officials or diplomats participating in United Nations activities. Further, the Department has also organized training seminars for Member States on the use of the Internet as a tool for development, as well as instructional workshops on

web site development for Permanent Missions of Spanish-speaking Member States in New York.

26. An intriguing example of a service provided to delegations while ostensibly aimed elsewhere is the large number of daily press releases in English and French issued by the Department of Public Information's meetings coverage staff in New York and Geneva. The structure and lengthy speaker-by-speaker format of the press releases means that they provide, in effect, an informal summary record of intergovernmental meetings, available the same day (unlike the official summary records, which are issued, sometimes weeks after the meeting, by another Department). While the purpose of DPI in producing these press releases is, as the term implies, to serve the media, their principal consumers are in fact the delegations, particularly of Member States whose missions are not large enough to cover all the official meetings being held each day. The Department of Public Information has repeatedly been told how necessary these summaries are for the work of delegations, and how extensively they are used in their reports back to capitals in the absence of official summaries or verbatim records issued in time to meet their requirements. Yet if the cost of this service (which, because of the unpredictable nature of the duration of most intergovernmental meetings, perennially runs over budget) were sought to be justified purely in relation to its use by the press, there would be a reasonable case for its discontinuation or drastic reduction (to coverage of only a few selected major meetings). Once again, it is for Member States to determine whether they wish the Department of Public Information to continue to provide this service.

27. The four paragraphs above serve to illustrate the strategic difficulty involved in crafting the mission statement proposed in the preceding section. It could be argued that, if the Organization were to create a Department of Public Information from scratch in the present climate of straitened resources and belt-tightening, such activities might not find a place in it. Yet, given that the Department exists and that Member States have become accustomed over five decades to the availability of these services, it is difficult, in conducting the present review, to disregard the reasons why these practices have evolved in the work of the Department. The question remains whether they detract from the impact the Department can make in its core mission or whether they are, in the view of Member States, essential components of that mission. If they are the former, there is a case for discontinuing some of them and for transferring some to other Departments of the Secretariat.

V. The road ahead

A. A culture of communication and coordination

28. As the Secretary-General has often stated, reform is a process, not an event. The ongoing review of the Department of Public Information is occurring in the midst of an effort already begun in response to the Secretary-General's call for the creation of a culture of communications in the Organization. The Interim Head of DPI has instituted daily meetings with his senior management team to increase coordination across the Department. In addition to his participation in the Secretary-General's Senior Management Group, he attends regular staff meetings of the Secretary-General twice a week, to ensure close coordination between communications issues and the work of the Secretary-General. He also chairs the Communications Group, which is composed of communications professionals from within the Secretariat and the wider United Nations system, who meet weekly to share common communications concerns. There is, indeed, extensive communication and exchange of information among various units on major international developments which concern various parts of the United Nations system. The Department also plays a leading role in the new mechanism for inter-agency coordination in the field of public information and communications, the United Nations Communications Group, which replaces the Joint United Nations Information Committee, and for which DPI provides the secretariat.

29. The insufficient degree of coordination between the Department of Public Information and other Secretariat Departments, and the dissatisfaction some have expressed with regard to the communications support they receive from DPI, will need to be redressed. At the same time it is necessary to take note of the development of separate public information capacities and activities in other Departments. There is a strong case, in some Departments, for the maintenance of an in-house capacity for communications and advocacy by staff working directly, on a daily basis, with the substantive officials

of the Departments concerned. An analogy could be drawn with the Executive Officers outposted in each Department who provide administrative services under the overall guidance of, and in execution of policies, rules and procedures laid down by, the Department of Management. However, unlike the Executive Officers, the information staff in the substantive Departments do not, at present, work under the guidance of the Department of Public Information. This is an area where remedial action should ideally be taken, in close coordination with those Departments. This is not to suggest that all information staff should be regrouped within the Department of Public Information, but rather that coordination should be improved, and that DPI, in turn, should structure itself so as to provide a more direct interface with the substantive Departments.

30. In the meantime, a part of the onus clearly falls on those Departments as well. The development of effective communications strategies and programmes requires that DPI be included in their decision-making processes and, for major activities, that DPI participate in the relevant planning meetings from the beginning of the preparatory process. An important step in this direction has been taken by the Deputy Secretary-General, who has convened regular meetings on issues of communications strategy for specific United Nations issues, including the substantive Departments and DPI. In keeping with this approach, the Department of Public Information will develop new mechanisms to work more closely with client Departments in planning and implementing thematic communications campaigns. The Interim Head of the Department has presented to the Secretary-General's Senior Management Group a number of specific steps that could be taken by other Departments in cooperation with DPI to ensure the success of this new orientation. To prioritize activities, DPI will also hold regular meetings with client Departments to gauge campaign success and modify its activities as necessary.

B. Performance management

31. It is fully understood that performance management must be a vital part of all of the major DPI activities and programmes. In this regard, and to address the overall lack of measurable indicators to evaluate programme impact, the Interim Head intends to place greater emphasis on evaluating the impact of each of the Department's major activities. In this connection, DPI was the first department to take a pro-active approach to results-based budgeting, by organizing an evaluation workshop in January of this year for 90 DPI programme managers. Evaluation projects currently under way in DPI include reviews of the guided tours operation, the DPI Training Programme for Broadcasters and Journalists from Developing Countries, the association of non-governmental organizations with DPI, and the DPI Media Alert. Starting in 2001, the list of non-governmental organizations associated with DPI has been carefully reviewed, and those that have been unable to demonstrate continuing efforts to promote the objectives of the United Nations have been disaffiliated. This process continues.

32. The need for a systematic evaluation of the live radio project is clear, given that the General Assembly has approved it for a trial period. While specific listener feedback has so far been received on an ad hoc basis, the scope of the reach of United Nations radio programmes is suggested by the fact that among the 265 radio stations carrying DPI broadcasts are such "clients" as the Voice of Russia (100 million listeners), the Radio Corporation of Nigeria (50 million listeners), Radio Cairo (20 million listeners), and the Voice of OAS (Organization of American States; 8-10 million listeners through the Voice of America). Participating stations will nonetheless be asked to provide more detailed listenership surveys — including information on such matters as the size of the audience during the times when United Nations programmes are broadcast — to better facilitate evaluation by DPI of these programmes.

33. While resources for evaluation activities are limited, DPI is taking steps to build systematic evaluation into the work of all units. The Interim Head of the Department is developing plans to institute an annual programme impact review to justify which programmes should be maintained, expanded, or eliminated. In the course of the biennium, the Department will accelerate its movement towards a new "evaluation culture" of increased performance management, which recognizes the need to ensure that the most important activities are under constant review. As part of this process, the Department will survey the views of its main clients, including, importantly, Member States. Serious evaluation work will, however, cost money, and resources to pursue it will have to come at the expense of other budgeted activities.

C. Organizational consolidation

34. In recognizing that some information functions are split among the Department's divisions, and that certain activities are not aligned with core DPI competencies, the Department is considering certain organizational changes. These would entail consolidating certain functions within DPI, or in some cases, moving certain functions outside the Department. In keeping with the clear definition of its aspirations, the Department has to consider whether some of the functions it currently undertakes are consistent with its core mission. The place of the Cartographic Section within the Department, for instance, is being reviewed. In turn, it is conceivable that some functions may be transferred to the Department from other organizational units. One area of overlap and confusion pointed out in the course of the review relates to news and media relations and the division of responsibilities between DPI and the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General; another concerns the locus of responsibility for liaison with non-governmental organizations and the division of responsibilities between DPI and the Office of External Relations. The views of the Committee on Information on perceived shortcomings of this nature will be fully taken into account.

35. The mix of means used by the Department of Public Information to disseminate its message remains a key area for review. The Department produces its own print material (ranging from press releases to hardcover publications), radio programmes (both live and taped), television material (both raw footage, for example of General Assembly meetings, and edited programmes) and Internet material (on www.un.org and associated sites, notably the United Nations News Centre). The extent to which it should maintain or modify these products, and the extent to which it should instead rely on reaching the public through existing external media to a greater degree than at present, are issues for serious consideration.

D. Publications

36. The consolidation of the production of DPI publications within the Department's organizational structure is also planned. However, DPI efforts in this area must await the larger review of United Nations publications and information materials called for by the General Assembly in resolution 56/253, which will cover the many publications produced by a number of organizational units beyond the Department's purview.

37. A few key questions must nonetheless be addressed. To what extent are some "flagship" publications ends in themselves, irrespective of such considerations as the high cost of producing them? The issue is particularly relevant in relation to some of the recurrent DPI publications. With projected costs in 2002 of $1.5 million, each copy of the *Yearbook*, for example, costs the Department approximately $435 to produce, taking into account staff costs as well as production. It is clear that these costs will never be recouped, given the modest sales of the *Yearbook*, whose principal distribution is gratis. One possible conclusion from this is that the publication is financially unviable and therefore should be discontinued. However, this would be tantamount to closing down the main reference work of record for the Organization, one which has met the highest standards of quality and reliability for 56 years. The views of Member States on the continued utility of the *Yearbook* are therefore essential.

38. Similarly, the *Chronicle*, with projected costs in 2002 of $1.1 million, including staff and production costs, continues to run a large annual deficit, despite striking and visible improvements in its editorial and production quality. Since the publication reaches a subscriber base of some 9,000 readers in English and fewer in other languages, some would be inclined to close it down, despite its venerable pedigree. Others would argue that since many of the subscribers are institutions, the actual readership is considerably larger, and that the publication serves a valuable function as a public information vehicle, which should not be required to pay for itself. An alternative approach which the Department is pursuing more actively is to attempt to widen its reach through an energized and constantly updated web site, as well as by placing its contents as syndicated features in publications around the world, with the assistance of the United Nations information centres. In the latter approach, the creative editorial staff of the journal would function as a syndicated feature service for the Organization. If this strategy works, it would give the *Chronicle*'s output an audience several times larger than its subscription base, with the journal itself becoming, in effect, a by-product of the feature service. Some have suggested that this approach could even

eliminate the need for a printed journal altogether. Once again the views of Member States, which have repeatedly instructed the Department of Public Information to produce the *Chronicle* in all six official languages, will be crucial as the publication's future is reassessed. The lessons learned on the *Chronicle* will also be applied, as appropriate, to *Africa Recovery*.

E. Information technology

39. While DPI has made many advances in utilizing communications technology to widen the impact of its programmes, it is essential that the Department better leverage this technology, which would also entail upgrading its infrastructure. The advances made so far have largely come from a reallocation of resources within the DPI budget, which has severely limited the degree of progress that could be made, particularly in such areas as multilingualism. Other limitations and problems have resulted from the "server" constraints in the Secretariat and are not specific to DPI, though they affect the Department in its role as the webmaster of the United Nations web site. The Committee may wish to recall that the General Assembly has approved cuts in the amount of $10 million in the programme budget for upgrading equipment in 2002-2003, making it impossible to implement the necessary upgrades in technology to improve the United Nations web site. At the same time, the appropriate balance between electronic publishing and the traditional means of communication (radio, television and print publications) has been difficult to determine, particularly in a context in which the demands for greater emphasis on information technology and increased provision of translations on the web site have not been matched with corresponding resources.

F. Dag Hammarskjöld Library

40. The services provided by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, which recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary, were reviewed in a parallel process, using the pro bono services of expert librarians. Though the Department must still await the results of the overall review of United Nations system library services, including the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the libraries in Geneva and Vienna, libraries in the regional commissions, departmental libraries, libraries at information centres and depository libraries called for by the General Assembly in resolution 56/253, some basic findings have already emerged.

41. The mission of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, as indicated in paragraph 23 above, is to support the delegates and Permanent Missions to the United Nations and the staff of the Secretariat with the information and research required to make informed decisions and to carry out their responsibilities. A secondary mission is to maintain an archival collection of United Nations documents and publications in all formats of issuance, and to provide users worldwide with bibliographic and other information and support to access United Nations information effectively (e.g., bibliographic control over United Nations documents, databases, web site, depository library programme).

42. While the various missions are all important to the United Nations, each is in competition with the others for scarce resources within the Library. For example, the strict deadlines attached to indexing of documents, as well as the heavy demands placed on the reference and loan services during sessions of the General Assembly, oblige the Library to give priority to General Assembly-related activities during those periods. United Nations documents are catalogued and indexed and available on the bibliographic utility by 1 p.m. on the day of release. While this is quite an accomplishment, it requires that other activities be deferred or put aside. A reprioritization of library functions will be considered in the light of consultant recommendations and the proposed review of the libraries of the United Nations Organization as a whole.

G. United Nations conferences

43. The Department continues to be tasked with a significant amount of conference-related work, which has increased dramatically in recent years. In this regard, the Department is looking at creative ways to rationalize this workload in partnership with the substantive Departments concerned, so that special conferences are adequately supported. Since these conferences are defining moments for the Organization and are prepared within short deadlines, they require the expertise of United Nations staff with experience in the work of the Organization. This makes it part of the Department's core responsibility to promote such conferences, a fact not always reflected in the traditional budgetary procedures, which have obliged

the Department to plan and staff its conference support on an ad hoc basis.

H. Direct outreach activities

44. The issue of de-emphasizing direct outreach in the Department's priorities gives rise, however, to a conundrum. The organization of special events at Headquarters, which are somewhat limited in reach and geographic scope, is a case in point. It has to be asked whether it is worth the staff time and resources expended on the commemoration of various International Days, Weeks, Years and Decades, proclaimed by the General Assembly, when these events reach an audience of a few hundred people in New York. However, as long as these occasions constitute important United Nations observances, it is difficult to imagine the Secretariat ceasing to commemorate them — though somewhat more modest commemorations could be devised that do not involve the organization of events or panel discussions at Headquarters. Pending a decision on this matter at the conclusion of the current review, attempts are being made to leverage events held at Headquarters to global audiences through video-conferencing and other means. As an example, to maximize the reach of the International Women's Day (8 March) programme at Headquarters this year, the broadcast media, including major television syndicators, like AP television, Reuters television, and CNN, were alerted in advance to the significance and newsworthiness of this event. In addition, with the help of the Better World Fund, a five-minute summary for television stations around the world was prepared and disseminated via satellite to 88 countries. In these countries, information centres and other United Nations offices provided local broadcasters with the translated text for national use. Coverage of the event in the United States was excellent, with 82 different broadcasts about the event in 38 cities nationwide. CNN, CNN Headline News, CNBC, MSNBC and C-Span (which carried the two-hour event live) are the national outlets that aired coverage of the event. Most of the coverage in the 38 markets was provided by network affiliates in each city. In many cases, more than one affiliate aired coverage of the event. While such exposure may not be possible for all special events, it points to the way in which the United Nations can improve the communications benefits it derives from such traditional activities.

45. DPI also manages the exhibition space at Headquarters and mounted 19 special exhibitions in 2001, 3 of which also travelled to 10 cities. Most of the costs involved were paid by the exhibitors. Some have observed that most of these exhibitions reach only those members of the public who visit Headquarters (or the other cities to which the exhibits travel), and have suggested that they do not warrant the expenditure of staff time and resources in a climate of budgetary constraint. Others see them as putting the physical space of the United Nations to good use while serving a vital promotional purpose for the Organization, attracting school groups and other important elements of the host community. The views of the Committee would be welcome as the Department reviews the relative importance of such exhibitions.

46. Another area for potential streamlining to save costs might be the journalists' training programmes, which benefit a limited number of journalists from developing countries at a significant dollar cost per journalist trained. The number of journalists being trained has declined each year as costs have increased within a static budget. Nonetheless, the value to the United Nations of a United Nations-trained (and therefore well-informed, as well as possibly well-disposed) journalist in later years is difficult to quantify, as is the political importance of extending such training to nationals of countries who may not be in a position to afford it otherwise. It is for Member States to determine whether such programmes should continue, or whether their costs outweigh the benefits they provide.

47. Similarly, the Guided Tours operation, even in the face of its budget deficit ($1.7 million for 2000 and the first six months of 2001), is widely seen as an indispensable operation, one which brings the public closer to the "human face" of the Organization in a vivid and personal manner. It is recognized that some of the deficit is the direct result of security restrictions on the number of visitors per tour and the impact of events beyond the Department's control, including the closure of the United Nations Headquarters building for prolonged periods. If a de-emphasis on direct outreach of this nature were to lead the Organization to eliminate or drastically reduce this programme on budgetary grounds, during its fiftieth anniversary as a United Nations activity, many would argue that this would do more harm than good. The issue of guided visits to Headquarters is being reviewed in the context

of the proposed new "Visitors' Experience" project. Once again the question arises to what extent cost considerations should constitute the principal factor relevant to evaluating the work of a United Nations promotional activity, and to what degree Member States may feel strongly about the continuing need for such programmes irrespective of cost.

I. United Nations Information Centres

48. The resources expended on the United Nations Information Centres and United Nations field offices, which account for 35 per cent of the DPI budget, warrant detailed consideration. Since the Centres are currently the subject of an ongoing review by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, however, it would be premature to draw definitive conclusions before that assessment is received. A few observations are nonetheless relevant.

49. The United Nations Information Centres serve as the local focal point in their countries for information outreach programmes on behalf of the United Nations system by organizing press conferences, educational seminars, exhibits, etc., to promote special United Nations observances, major reports and global conferences. As local versions of the Department of Public Information, they communicate the position of the Organization, as conveyed to them by Headquarters, to media organizations, key opinion makers and the general public, and pre-empt and respond to negative and inaccurate reporting of the work of the Organization. They arrange for the translation and adaptation of United Nations information materials into local languages. They build local partnerships with government departments (including official information services), national and local media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and national library services to promote public awareness and support for the United Nations, organize model United Nations sessions and journalists' training programmes and support educational curricula development.

50. United Nations Information Centres disseminate United Nations information materials as the principal channel through which these materials reach target audiences worldwide; post local language publications on the Internet and links with the United Nations home page where possible; maintain United Nations reference libraries providing access to print, audio and visual materials from DPI and other departments and offices, as well as United Nations agencies; provide assistance to the public in conducting traditional research and navigating the United Nations home page on the Internet; organize training workshops for local librarians; inspect United Nations depository libraries and report to Headquarters on their requirements. United Nations Information Centres provide Headquarters, and other United Nations programmes and agencies, with feedback on national and regional media coverage of United Nations activities and developments. They also handle the logistical requirements and media liaison for the Secretary-General and other United Nations officials during visits.

51. Though numbers do not always tell the story, the Information Centres carried out 7,220 information activities in 2001 on United Nations priority themes, including 798 activities on human rights, 847 on peace and security, 1,546 on social issues and 520 on development. These included a major outreach campaign after 11 September to disseminate to Governments, the media and the public actions taken by the Secretary-General, the General Assembly and the Security Council on international terrorism. Other examples of the range of Information Centres' actions included UNIC Accra assisting the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in organizing a United Nations training seminar for armed forces from the West African region, UNIC Islamabad coordinating United Nations-related briefings for the international press gathering in Pakistan before and during the coalition military operations in Afghanistan, UNIC Mexico coordinating a joint United Nations system launch of the UN Works campaign, UNIC Moscow organizing a high-level international conference on international law in the twenty-first century, and UNIC Tehran coordinating the organization of a 12-week seminar on international organizations for the Iranian Foreign Ministry's School of International Relations.

52. It should also be understood that a large number of activities performed by the Centres are not public information or communications activities in nature, such as administering surveys on salary, housing and local costs, arranging national recruitment examinations, and coordinating logistics for visiting officials. This is often unavoidable, even if they are not part of the Information Centres' core responsibilities. Whether or not this is the best utilization of limited

resources, the Centre is often the only United Nations office in the country concerned and these ancillary tasks cannot be deployed elsewhere. The issue of whether the Centres' reference libraries are indispensable to their public outreach effort, especially where public access is limited or where strong relationships with depositories exist, will also be reviewed in the context of the review of United Nations system libraries mentioned in paragraph 40 above.

53. To maximize the limited resources available to Information Centres, the creation of regional information centre "hubs", as suggested by the High-level Task Force appointed by the Secretary-General, would need to be considered, especially (but not exclusively) in areas where linguistic commonalities facilitate regionalization. This concept should of course be applied in a flexible way, taking into account the views of Member States. Other organizations of the United Nations system could be asked to contribute financially to the establishment of these hubs, with joint information officers performing communications services for the entire United Nations system, a proposal that will be pursued with the other agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations.

54. A larger question is whether the Organization needs to maintain United Nations Information Centres in high-cost developed countries, whose populations have relatively greater access to a wide range of sources of information than their counterparts in the developing world. In recent months, several representatives of developing country Member States have approached the Department to propose the establishment, or restoration, of Information Centres in their countries. While this is a matter for the General Assembly to determine, given that the Department has no resources available for such expansion, it is clear that practical criteria should be established with regard to the location of United Nations Information Centres. One possible criterion would be the provision of free premises by the host Government. Another factor could relate to the need to disseminate information in languages, other than the six official languages, in which no United Nations information materials or web sites exist. The allocation of both staff and financial resources to the Information Centres is currently being reviewed by the Department, particularly with a view to moving resources from developed countries to developing ones. The question whether the number of Information Centres currently located in Europe is justified remains high on the agenda. One option is to target for reduction or possible elimination those Centres in selected developed countries where operating costs are increasingly prohibitive. It should be noted that rental and rent-related expenses make up approximately 40 per cent of the overall non-staff budget of Information Centres, a large portion of these costs being incurred in just five developed-country capitals. A more systematic process of sharing and disseminating information between these offices and United Nations Associations will be explored, particularly in developed countries. In some cases, this may permit the streamlining of the United Nations presence, with a corresponding increased reliance on the Associations to assume functions currently performed by Information Centres.

55. In the context of overall human resources reform, the Department also plans to create a mechanism to promote the rotation of staff to and from the field and, in a related initiative, to place limits on the number of years an Information Centre Director can serve at any one location.

VI. Conclusions

56. The thrust of the ongoing review of the Department of Public Information is to provide an analysis of the current situation, and a number of broad recommendations with regard to the Department's aspirations and goals. The discrete and fragmented nature of the Department's many existing functions has meant that the foregoing analysis has read in places like a list of individual activities rather than an overall strategic concept. This has been unavoidable in the circumstances, though each item has been analysed in the context of the newly proposed mission statement set out in paragraph 19 above. The clear conclusion is however, that the Department must prioritize its work programme to better focus its message and concentrate its efforts and, as a function of performance management, to match its programmes with the needs of its target audiences, on the basis of improved feedback and evaluation mechanisms. It will then be in a position to better balance the allocation of its resources among a proliferation of mandated activities and make, over time, the necessary changes in the Department's organizational structure to optimize its core competencies. Although much has been done in the area of technology, it will also be necessary to

enhance the technological infrastructure of the Department of Public Information to widen its outreach.

57. The Department has made an honest effort, in the context of this report, to acknowledge its shortcomings and to articulate to Member States the challenges it faces in improving its efficiency and productivity. It acknowledges that it has suffered from being pulled in too many directions, with a corresponding fragmentation of its efforts, and a dilution of their effect. In an environment of budgetary constraint, realistic goals must be set and programmes tailored accordingly, so that all the activities of the Department will over time become more forward-looking and performance-driven. To improve its programme performance, the Department of Public Information is defining the goal of each activity and developing key indicators to evaluate whether it is achieving that goal. At the same time it will look closely at those activities it should increase or add to its functions, from the development of a global feature service to enhanced programme evaluations. It is also recommended that the Department consider a new name to better reflect the redefined aspirations outlined in this report. Among the proposals being considered is to rename DPI the Department of Communications and External Relations.

58. This report has described how many of the current DPI activities are, strictly speaking, not activities aimed at providing information to the general public. Under a more focused and targeted aspiration — as described in section IV — DPI would be in a better position to (a) proactively develop a more effective and efficient communication strategy for the United Nations, (b) articulate the best way the Department can align its programme and activities to fulfil the United Nations communication strategy, and (c) jointly decide with the Committee on Information whether these strategies and programmes best serve the United Nations.

59. A key issue which has arisen in the course of this review is the extent to which financial considerations should determine the continuance of a mandated programme. In general, financial transparency can help make Member States aware of the connection between the cost of a programme and its measurable impact. Yet it is clear that some activities are considered by Member States as worth promoting for valid political or programmatic reasons, outside of strict cost considerations. Whereas costs are always quantifiable, benefits cannot always be expressed in numbers. The views of the Committee on Information on this dilemma would be useful in helping the Department to prioritize its programmes. However, for the Department to successfully reset its priorities, thereby positioning itself along the lines outlined in this report, it is clear that certain low-impact activities will need to be discontinued, if resources and energies are to be transferred to activities which are more strategically aligned to its mission. It will not be possible to continue all of the present work of DPI and simultaneously emphasize priority tasks. While the reform of DPI will be a continuing process, the Secretariat will be obliged to make some difficult choices. So too must Member States.

60. The continuing review of the Department has identified a number of deficiencies, strengths, challenges and opportunities. It is the intention of the Secretary-General that the process now under way, and the resulting changes that emerge, will permit the Department of Public Information — under that or another name — to fulfil its cardinal role as the torch-bearer of the Organization. The Department seeks nothing more than to measure up to its simply stated aspiration for the Organization's indispensable work to achieve the greatest possible impact on the hearts and minds of the peoples of the world.

Annex

Additional information on the work of the Department

In several paragraphs of resolution 56/64 B, the General Assembly called for specific details on the work of the Department of Public Information to be provided to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session, in the context of the Secretary-General's report on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications. That information is set out in the present annex.

In paragraph 24, the General Assembly recognizes the need for enhanced publicity through a targeted strategy to be developed by the Department of Public Information on the special sessions and conferences ... which will address issues crucial to the international community, particularly the developing countries, as well as on the ongoing Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and requests the Secretary-General to take necessary action in this regard.

1. The Department of Public Information develops communications strategies for each major global conference and each special session of the General Assembly with the purpose of building worldwide interest on the part of the media, non-governmental organizations, and the public. The goal is to raise awareness of the United Nations role and to galvanize public commitment to support action on the issues to be addressed by the event.

2. These strategies, developed a year or more in advance of each conference or special session, are formulated in close collaboration with the substantive department acting as the secretariat for the event. For high-profile conferences or special sessions, the strategies are also prepared under the guidance of the Office of the Deputy Secretary-General. Through the United Nations Communications Group, the strategies are circulated to the heads of information of the organizations, funds and programmes, and regular follow-up meetings are held under the auspices of the Group to coordinate implementation. The United Nations Information Centres work to implement these communications strategies, and provide regular progress reports to the Department on their related activities.

3. The strategies outline the aims and purposes of the public information campaign to publicize the conference or special session and to promote the issues being addressed by the event. The strategies identify the message(s) to be conveyed, the means to convey them, and the target audiences, and establish who will implement the strategy and how the implementation will be coordinated both in the Secretariat and within the wider United Nations family. The strategies are continually refined in the period leading up to the conference or special session, so that they will reflect decisions taken during the preparatory process. In addition, specific media strategies are frequently developed to target and coordinate outreach to the media in the crucial three or four months immediately prior to the event.

4. The Department coordinates and monitors the implementation of these communications and media strategies. It also undertakes the preparation and distribution of the core public information products for the promotional campaign, including press materials, public service advertisements, posters and billboards. The Department works with the information components of key civil society organizations concerned with the specific issues, to encourage them to utilize and redisseminate the core information products and messages. It also develops and maintains a list of key media contacts for each specific campaign, and provides them with story ideas and materials before the conference or special session to encourage coverage.

5. As part of these communications strategies, the Department frequently organizes special promotional activities, such as the lighting of the Secretariat building with the red AIDS ribbon during the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, and special briefings or press conferences to target the news media. If funding permits, fellowships are arranged for journalists from developing countries to attend the conference or special session.

6. The Department developed and implemented specific communications strategies for the conferences and special sessions held in 2001 on the least developed countries (with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development taking the

lead), Habitat, HIV/AIDS and small arms and against racism. It has also developed and implemented communications strategies for the International Conference on Financing for Development, the Second World Assembly on Ageing and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, being held in 2002.

7. The success of these communications strategies is determined, in large part, by the level of resources made available to the Department for the public information campaign to promote each conference or special session. This can vary from no additional resources, as was the case for the Second World Assembly on Ageing, to the receipt of $585,200, which was approved by the General Assembly to promote and publicize the special session on HIV/AIDS.

8. It should be noted that the Department does not normally prepare a communications strategy for international decades. Ten years is a lengthy period for a sustained public information campaign, and would require a substantial commitment of resources. However, the Department is cognizant of the need to generate publicity in support of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and has recently issued a four-colour brochure in English, French and Spanish. It outlines the role of the United Nations in the decolonization process and describes the challenges ahead for the international community in implementing the mandate of the Decade. The brochure is being distributed through the United Nations Information Centres and in the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories, and is also available on a page dedicated to the question of decolonization on the United Nations home page. An article on the work of the Committee, written by the Acting Chairman of the Committee on Decolonization, was reproduced by the Department's periodic publication, the *United Nations Chronicle*, in its December 2001-February 2002 issue.

In paragraph 32, information is requested on the involvement of the Department of Public Information in the context of the implementation of the Secretary-General's recommendations on the establishment of United Nations houses.

9. The Department of Public Information is fully involved in the process of implementation of the Secretary-General's recommendation on the establishment of United Nations houses. It is represented in the Working Group on Common Premises and Services of the Development Group Office, which reviews proposals on the establishment of United Nations houses. Additionally, the Department receives proposals from United Nations resident coordinators when the establishment of a United Nations house is planned in a country that is hosting a United Nations Information Centre.

10. In reviewing the proposals for relocating to a United Nations house, the Department ensures that (a) the relocation is cost-effective; (b) the rent-free status, where applicable, is maintained; (c) the space is adequate for the facilities of a United Nations Information Centre, including a reference library and a meeting room; and (d) the building location allows for easy access by students, members of the local media, governmental staff, non-governmental organizations and the general public. So far, 17 United Nations Information Centres have been relocated to officially designated United Nations houses. This figure does not include several other centres participating in common premises, which are not officially designated as United Nations houses.

Concerning the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the General Assembly, in paragraph 44, welcomes the role of the Department in fostering increased collaboration among libraries of the United Nations system, particularly in establishing one central system-wide online catalogue that would allow for the searching of the bibliographic records of print holdings, as well as electronic holdings and databases maintained by those libraries, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon.

11. In addition to its own Public Access Catalogue, the Library continues to make its bibliographic records available electronically in several other ways, such as uploading records on a daily basis to ODS (which extracts certain fields as metadata for documents); producing a quarterly *CD-ROM UNBIS Plus*, in cooperation with a commercial vendor; providing records to a bibliographic utility, the Research Libraries Network (RLIN) (obtaining, in return, the right to download records for non-United Nations material from RLIN into Horizon); establishing a Z39.50 connection (obviating the need to export records physically) with UNCAPS, the web-based union catalogue maintained for a number of United Nations system agencies. UNCAPS is currently maintained on the International Computing Centre

server in Geneva and is supported in its day-to-day operations with funds from the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. The United Nations system libraries are currently exploring options to fund the upgrading and further development of this service.

12. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library is also increasingly active in knowledge sharing. It chairs the Information and Communications Technology Board's Task Force on Sharing Knowledge of the Secretariat Internally and Externally which, inter alia, will be developing guidelines for the Extranet. The Library is also active within the inter-agency library "community of practice", which reconstituted itself in April 2001 as the Inter-Agency Working Group on Knowledge Sharing and Information Management. This Group, which is chaired by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is scheduled to meet from 26 to 28 June 2002 in Paris, to plan future collaborative efforts in knowledge sharing.

In paragraph 45 the General Assembly requests the Department of Public Information to ensure the continued development of the integrated library system in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, and requests a report thereon.

13. In this connection, it should be noted that the Integrated Library Management System (Horizon), a UNIX-based client server software, permits all of the Library's major operations (cataloguing/indexing, acquisitions, serials checklisting, circulation) to be performed entirely online, in an integrated fashion (sharing of data among modules) and linked to an online retrieval module for in-house use. Non-Library users are served through a web-based public access catalogue, maintained outside the firewall, to which data is loaded on a daily basis. This catalogue (http://unbisnet.un.org/) is available to Internet users throughout the world free of charge. Library systems staff regularly add customizations to the software to enhance its functioning, such as local tags to represent unique United Nations information, and new indexed fields.

14. The vendor provides regular upgrades to both Horizon and the web catalogue, to which the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is entitled through its regular maintenance contracts. A recent upgrade to Horizon has improved efficiency in acquisitions operations, including electronic ordering and electronic claiming of serials from those vendors who have the capacity to receive such communications electronically. Still, the Library is several software releases behind schedule, as the latest version of the software requires installation of Windows 2000 on client computers. Unfortunately, a major upgrading of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library's computers to accommodate this operating system was not possible in the biennium 2000-2001 because of substantial budget cuts. New computers are now on order and are scheduled for delivery in the first quarter of 2002. A related problem, the delayed introduction of Windows 2000 as the official Secretariat standard for desktop computers, may be close to resolution. Once the latest version of the Integrated Library Management System can be installed, the major improvement will be UNICODE compliance, that is, the support of multilingual scripts. Other improvements include the ability to load, save and export serials holding data in a full MARC format as well as enhanced data entry functions such as word-processor style editing, dialogue bars for diacritics and spellchecking.

15. The web catalogue is being upgraded with the introduction of I-PAC, which includes new features such as downloadability of records in MARC format, greater flexibility in the design of search screens, and UNICODE compliance. Testing is also under way to permit the linking of UNBISNET records for United Nations documentation to the full text of the relevant documents on ODS.

In paragraph 58, the Department of Public Information, as the manager of the Organization's web site, is requested to take the lead in developing a proposal for the establishment of one central Internet portal that will encompass all web sites of the United Nations system, preferably through system-wide cooperation, and that will allow for the search and retrieval of information from all web sites in the United Nations system from one central search facility, and to report thereon.

16. At the outset, it must be emphasized that the question of a portal is an issue which requires the full participation of all partners in the system, so that it will be comprehensive. The issue is beyond the purview of the Department of Public Information since the High-level Committee on Management of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination has requested its Technical Adviser to prepare a preliminary study on the issue of the portal to be

submitted to the Committee at its meeting in September. The Department of Public Information is an important partner in this study, but cannot "take the lead" on its own.

17. Because of the inter-agency nature of the portal, the decision will have to be taken at the level of the Committee so that the participation of all agencies would be ensured. A number of United Nations agencies have contracted with Google — the leading Internet search engine, to provide search facilities for their sites. Those contracts could conceivably be built upon and extended to include the rest of the system. A number of issues will have to be resolved in the process, among them:

(a) Handling the widely differing data storage and retrieval systems on the web sites of the agencies of the United Nations system;

(b) The question whether the portal is a search engine in itself, aggregating the contents of the participating sites, or whether it is in itself a separate site;

(c) The question of a central entity to manage and actually run and maintain the portal;

(d) The financing of the operation and respective agency contributions.